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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION "POINT OF CONTACT" **NOVEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER**

NTSB Removes School Buses from States Most Wanted List

The National Transportation Safety Board recently released its Most Wanted Safety Improvements for state action. School Bus Grade Crossing safety was removed from this year's list due to sufficient positive action by the states. In 2001, the Board asked states to implement a comprehensive program to increase school bus safety at grade crossings, including installing stop signs, enhancing bus driver training, and requiring noise-reducing switches. Six states have installed stop signs at crossings. Thirty-three states have enhanced driver training, and sixteen states now require noise reducing switches (to mute the radio, heater and air conditioner) on newly purchased school buses. Twenty-one states have taken actions that satisfy the Board's recommendations. NTSB removed this issue area from the Most Wanted List, but said it would continue to work with the remaining States to implement the recommendation. The Board continues to include school buses on its list of Most Wanted Federal Issues, however. Enhancing school bus passenger protection is one of four items on the list, with recommendations to NHTSA to devise new standards to prevent school bus passengers from being thrown from their seats or ejected in any kind of crash impact. The item is marked with an "acceptable response, moving slowly" symbol.

Safety Habits – Scanning and Using Mirrors

Previously, proper scanning and using mirrors while driving was "sighted" (pun intended) as a fundamental safety habit for safe drivers. This article will further discuss these safe-driving habits.

First you must recognize that in order to properly scan the road and use mirrors the elements needed for these activities must be in proper place and in good working order. You must have good vision, be properly seated and have properly adjusted mirrors. You must also work at making proper scanning and use of mirrors a habit. Mirror inspection, adjustment, and cleaning should be done during vehicle pre-trip inspection. If your vehicle is only used by you, re-adjustment of the mirrors should be minimal unless they have a tendency to be bumped from their set position. You still need to check the adjustment and make sure they are clean. If, however, you are using a vehicle you do not normally operate, or one operated by several drivers, you will need to take the time to properly adjust the mirrors. While not required, mirror check stations (a station where cones, lines, and other indicators have been permanently placed to allow you to determine proper mirror placement) can be established and will allow you to set your mirrors to the proper position without guess work. Properly adjusted mirrors together with proper scanning allow you to see what is in front of, along the sides of, and to some extent behind your vehicle with the exception of blind spots. You can gain a little more field of vision in your mirrors by slightly leaning in your seat when looking through your side mirrors. Scanning and use of mirrors allow you to recognize potential hazards and take proper actions to avoid those hazards. Scanning and use of mirrors should be constant and is critical in several maneuvers. While scanning as far ahead as possible is a good idea, as a general rule, drivers should look about 12-15 seconds ahead of their vehicles. This translates in 2-3 blocks in the city and just over ¼ mile on the highway. If you can't see that far ahead, you should slow down. Drivers should also be using their mirrors to scan the sides and rear of the vehicle. Drivers should be checking mirrors about every 4 seconds. This will allow you to keep track of the location of other vehicles and any developing hazardous conditions. Frequent mirror use and scanning will also help you decide your best choice in an emergency event.

Scanning requires constant movement of your eyes far and near and between mirrors and the road ahead. This helps keep you alert and maximizes identifying hazards. Scanning and mirror usage becomes critical during lane changes and turns, as well as backing. In general, you will be focusing on your right mirror for right hand turns and lane changes and your left mirror for left hand turns and lane changes. All mirrors will be used in backing. Mirror usage and scanning are also critical for school bus drivers during loading and unloading. During these phases the crossover mirrors should be scanned. Drivers should also be checking the side and rearview mirrors during this time. Drivers have use of the internal mirror to monitor students. Making proper scanning and mirror use a habit should be a fundamental goal of all drivers. As noted, this will assist in recognition of hazards. Additional training in defensive driving actions for recognized hazards will minimize accidents.

SUBJECT: NCST Manual Revised (Version 3)

The 2005 National School Transportation Specifications and Procedures (NSTSP) document has been revised to correct certain technical errors and to incorporate one amendment under the new interim amendment procedures of the National Congress on School Transportation (NCST). You can view or download the revised NSTSP (Version 3) at www.NCSTOnline.org. You can also link to a chart that lists all the specific changes contained in Version 3, including the page numbers where the changes are located.

Please let Pete Baxter, Chairman of the NCST Steering Committee, know if you have questions or comments. Pete can be reached at pbaxter@doe.state.in.us. Your assistance in notifying other interested parties and holders of the NSTSP about the revised document is greatly appreciated.

States Begin Issuing UCRA Registration Forms

At the beginning of this month, states began the process of registering motor carriers in the new Unified Carrier Registration Agreement system. If your headquarters are in a state that is part of the UCRA, (SD is one of these states) and if you have a DOT number, you either have received or soon will receive registration forms from the state.

UCRA is a state-based program, so you register with and pay your fees to one state. If you are located in one of the 17 states that are not part of the plan, you will have to choose another state to be your "base state." Carriers can register one of two ways—either with the state forms or online at www.ucr.in.gov.

Fees are based on your total commercial fleet size. One of the outstanding questions that has been posed to FMCSA is how school bus carriers should handle their intrastate buses. The forms allow truck owners to delete intrastate-only vehicles from their total fleet number, but they don't have the same accommodation for passenger vehicles. I believe this is an oversight, since only those buses that go out of state on activity or charter trips qualify as commercial vehicles in interstate commerce. There is no credential for the UCRA program that proves compliance. While your state may provide a receipt for your payment, it does not have to be carried in vehicles. Enforcement will generally be through roadside checks, which does not usually include school buses. Some states may check compliance of school bus carriers as part of their state inspections, however.

Currently SD is exempting school buses that are for intrastate travel only. However, if you are a private company under contract with a school district or you are providing for hire services on interstate travel you are required to be registered. This is true even if you are doing a school activity or any kind of trip outside the borders of SD.

Recalls

Blue Bird is recalling 485 **All American and Vision** MY 2008 school buses. A fuel pump failure will dilute the engine oil with fuel and cause loss of throttle control and excessive smoke. Either condition could result in a vehicle crash. Blue Bird is working in conjunction with Caterpillar to notify owners to contact their local Caterpillar dealer for a free remedy. The recall is expected to begin during September 2007.

Freightliner is recalling 4,850 MY 2005-2006 **FS-65** and **FB-65** school bus and motor home chassis. Improper pinch bolt installation may result in decoupling of the steering shaft and a loss of steering. Loss of steering may result in a vehicle crash. Dealers will inspect and ensure that the steering shaft pinch bolts are properly installed. The recall is expected to begin on or about October 22, 2007.

Blue Bird is recalling 1,847 MY 1985-1993 **Conventional** school buses built with an optional firewall heater hose connector on the driver's side of the bus. These buses were manufactured without the left front driver's side close out or the heater hose cover was not ordered and installed in conjunction with the firewall connector. In the event the heater hose should rupture or the connection separate on the driver's side of the firewall, hot engine coolant may contact the driver and may cause injury. Blue Bird will repair these buses by installing a metal protective shield over the heater hoses. The recall is expected to begin during September 2007.

Freightliner is recalling MY 2004-2006 **Thomas Built FS-65** and **Saf-T-Liner** school buses. During the steering column manufacturing process, two welds may have been missing. Columns with two welds missing may fatigue and fracture allowing the steering wheel to progressively be moved out of its normal position. This may cause the steering to respond differently than expected. If this condition is ignored, a crash may occur. Freightliner will inspect and repair the affected vehicles. The recall was expected to begin in late August.

Blue Bird is recalling 192 MY 2006-2008 **All American** rear engine school and transit buses equipped with emergency push out windows. The subject buses were manufactured with an incorrect number of emergency exits. Blue Bird will notify owners and install additional emergency exit windows on each side of the subject buses. The recall was expected to begin in late August.

Freightliner is recalling MY 2007-2008 **FCCC B2** school bus chassis, and **Thomas Built Saf-T-Liner C2** and **HDX** school buses equipped with Axle Alliance Company (AAC) front axles. During the front axle assembly, the fasteners that attach the steering arm or tie rod arms to the spindle may be over or under tightened. Incorrectly tightened steering arm

fasteners may fatigue and fracture which could cause a crash without warning. Freightliner will notify owners and repair the vehicles. The recall was expected to begin in late August.

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